



## **Madagascar**

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2004**

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The country has a total area of 228,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 16.5 million. Although precise official figures are unavailable, approximately half of the population belongs to one of the country's four Christian denominations. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination, followed by the Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). President Ravalomanana is a lay vice president of FJKM. The Lutheran and Anglican Churches account for most of the remainder of the country's Christians. Most other citizens follow traditional indigenous religions. Muslims constitute slightly less than 10 percent of the population, with strong concentrations in the North and the northwestern portion of the island. Aboriginal and ethnic Indians who immigrated over the past century make up the majority of the Muslims in the country. There is a small number of Hindus among the ethnic Indians.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely in the country, including Catholics, Protestants of various denominations, the Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Several faith-based organizations, some with international affiliations, operate freely in health and social services, development projects, schools, and higher education.

### **Section II. Status of Religious Freedom**

#### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

The law strongly recommends, but does not require, religious organizations to register with the Ministry of Interior. Registration provides a religious organization with the legal status necessary for receipt of direct bequests and other gifts. There are no penalties for failure to register.

The Malagasy Council of Christian Churches (FFKM) is the umbrella organization for the country's four principal Christian denominations. Composed of the Roman Catholic, FJKM, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches, the FFKM is a key player on a broad range of issues. The FFKM is a traditional leader in education, and recently its role has expanded to include activities such as coordinating a national campaign against HIV/AIDS and election monitoring. In the political arena, the FFKM has been a mediator, bringing together antagonistic factions, but it has occasionally taken an overtly political position. Most recently, during the 2001 presidential campaign and the ensuing political crisis, it supported the then-mayor of Antananarivo, Marc Ravalomanana, in his ultimately successful bid to be president. President Ravalomanana's position as a lay Vice President of FJKM still generates some political criticism alleging church and state interests are not kept entirely separate. Nevertheless, the FFKM remains an active force on social and political issues.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedoms*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Numerous religious organizations operate freely in all regions of the country, often disseminating their message through public and private media. Religious organizations are granted free access to state-run media on the grounds that such access constitutes a public service. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of any religious organizations that were denied free access to state-run media.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversions*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### *Abuses by Terrorist Organizations*

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

### **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Ethnic Malagasy occasionally express resentment toward members of the predominantly Muslim Indo-Pakistani ("Karana") community. This attitude is derived from the relative economic prosperity of the Karana and not based on their religious affiliation. During the period covered by this report, President Ravalomanana continued to meet with Karana and Muslim leaders to discuss economic and citizenship issues.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy's September 2003 Human Rights Working Group session, devoted entirely to the country's Muslim community, stimulated discussion and increased mutual understanding between Muslim and non-Muslims. Representatives of various elements of the Muslim community made presentations on their beliefs and on the role and social context of Islam in the country. This session allowed a group traditionally on the outskirts of society to voice its desire for fuller acceptance into society.

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